



Article by Etnia Nativa

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Mangrove forests or mangrove swamps

Episode CCLXXV - 275

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During this episode, Etnia Nativa brings awareness regarding the value of our mangroves, which keep coastal zones protected and healthy. These are just a tiny fraction of what our mangrove forest used to be, however, providing essential habitat for thousands of species. They also stabilize shorelines, preventing erosion and protecting the land and the people who live in the area from waves and storms, especially during extreme weather events, acting as a powerful shield against storms, hurricanes, and tsunamis.

Aruba's mangroves have suffered very during the building of Willemstad, the capital city of our sister island, Curacao. The whole forest was cut down and sent for firewood for the burning of lime, which was used in construction.

For the inhabitants of Thailand, for example, the importance of mangroves is so great that they call them "the roots of the sea," and the fishermen there have a saying that goes like this: "If there are no mangrove forests, the sea will have no meaning. It is like having a tree with no roots, for the mangroves are the roots of the sea."

The reality is that they form transition vegetation from sea to land, offering great protection to tropical islands and continental shorelines, estuaries, and lagoons of tropical latitude. Some varieties are trees, while others are shrubs that can grow below the maximum level of tides and are very tolerant to the high salinity of sea water. Together, their forests form a separate and unique echo system in their own right.

They protect both the saltwater and the freshwater ecosystems they straddle. The mangroves' complex



root systems filter nitrates and phosphates that rainwater, rivers, and streams carry to the sea. They also keep seawater from encroaching on inland waterways.

According to experts, mangroves capture and store 34 million tons of carbon globally, which represents a great contribution to the fight against climate change and global heat. They promote biodiversity as they serve as a habitat in its entirety, above and under water. Many types of fish, crabs, shrimp, and mollusks inhabit its roots; birds also find a favorable habitat in the mangrove branches. They also provide spawning grounds for fish and crustaceans on nearby coral reefs and offer them shelter during the early stages of life.

Mangrove forests provide many of the resources upon which coastal people depend for their survival and livelihood. At low tide, people can walk across the tide flats to collect crabs, shellfish, and shrimp. At high tide, fish move in to feed among the protection of mangrove roots, turning the marshy

land into rich fishing grounds. The mangrove trees themselves provide fuel, medicines, tannins, and wood for building houses and boats.

Recent studies have shown that mangroves can be used for biotechnology. And due to its tolerance to salinity, the possibility of transferring genes taken from mangrove species to certain foods, such as rice, has been studied to develop new varieties of crops, generating new opportunities for coastal farmers. However, we must also keep in mind that mangroves are very susceptible to drastic change and delicate because they require an environment in balance to survive. This means that they require an appropriate concentration of fresh and salt water to thrive. The rise in sea level as a consequence of climate change causes a saline imbalance in the mangrove habitat that makes their survival difficult in addition to pollution caused by man and the overexploitation of resources. All this endangers these species, which are among the most diverse and productive in the world, offering so many benefits that they undoubtedly deserve governmental commitment and our protection.



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